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AUTHOR Phillips, Ron S.; Cranwell, Ford R.
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ABSTRACT

The paper, originally given at a 1986 Ethnic and Multicultural Symposium, discusses special education needs in band-operated schools in Manitoba. These are local Indian reserve schools under the direction of locally elected education authorities. The paper reports on a survey of needs (indicating 31% of students suspected of needing special services), funding limitations, and the tendency to utilize off-reserve placements. A community-based special education model is offered which encompasses five principles including equal access to schooling for Indian children with special needs regardless of the nature of the special learning needs; availability of appropriate, culturally sensitive special education and educational support services; availability of early childhood special education opportunities; opportunity for meaningful parental involvement; and education of special needs Indian children with non-special needs peers within local community settings whenever appropriate. Delineation of responsibilities of the schools themselves, the tribal councils, the Educational Support Services Unit, and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs is encouraged. Prospects for improved services are discussed in terms of recognition of needed services, fiscal support, and personnel. (DB)

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# The Need for Community-Based Special Education Programs in the Band-Operated Schools of Manitoba

**Ron S. Phillips**
**Ford R. Cranwell**

In federal, provincial, and band-operated schools throughout Canada the movement toward greater Indian involvement and control of Indian education has taken many forms as Indian people strive to ensure the transmission of their culture while providing meaningful, high-quality education. In this context, community-based, band-operated schools represent a unique opportunity for local bands to assume control of schooling in their communities.

In the course of furthering Indian control, little attention has been given to Indian children with special needs. Many of these children have exceptionalities or other learning problems that require specialized instruction, support services, materials, equipment, or educational settings. In circumstances where insufficient resources are available to assist students experiencing various kinds of learning difficulties, Indian children with special needs and their families are especially vulnerable and are at risk of not having their needs met.

This chapter examines the need for community-based special education programs in the band-operated schools of Manitoba. It reviews the current status of special education in band-operated schools, proposes a model for special education service delivery within Indian communities served by band-operated schools, and discusses the prospects for improved learning opportunities for Indian children with special needs.

## SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

In Canada, Indian children who live on reserves attend the following types of school jurisdictions:

- *Federal schools.* Located on reserves throughout Canada, these schools are operated by the federal government of Canada's Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) for the education of 21,791 Indian students (INAC, 1982). In Manitoba, 4,363 Indian students attend federal schools (INAC–Manitoba, 1985).
- *Provincial schools.* These are public schools throughout Canada operated by local school divisions which receive tuition payments from INAC for the education of 38,489 Indian students (INAC, 1982). In Manitoba, provincial schools received tuition for 4,158 Indian students (INAC–Manitoba, 1985).
- *Band-operated schools.* These are local reserve schools that receive funds from INAC but are under the direction of locally elected education authorities. In Manitoba these local

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education authorities are in turn responsible to the Chief and Council of the reserve. Throughout Canada, 15,906 Indian students attended band-operated schools (INAC, 1982). In Manitoba, the figure is 3,970 Indian students (INAC–Manitoba, 1985). These students are served by 30 band-operated schools.

## STATUS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

### Survey of Needs

The Manitoba Indian Education Association (MIEA) was created to support and promote the educational aspirations of Indian people on a province-wide basis. In 1984, MIEA surveyed 14 band-operated schools and 7 Tribal Councils (regional offices established to share resources), to ascertain the need for special education services (INAC, 1984a). Information on the needs of children and youth enrolled in band-operated schools or attending schools off reserve due to unavailable specialized services and on school-age children not in school was obtained through personal interviews with teachers, principals, directors of education, home/school coordinators and parents. The schools were selected on the basis of location and size to ensure that a good cross-section (high school, elementary, small and large enrollment, rural, isolated, and near urban settings) was surveyed.

The survey results indicated that 31% of the students were suspected of having one or more learning problems requiring specialized services (see Table 1). The teachers surveyed were almost unanimous in their dissatisfaction with the present lack of special education services. Needed services, personnel, and materials included: individual assessments, counseling, remedial teachers, special class teachers, consultative resource teachers, reading clinicians, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, special education materials, and additional space. These results as well as a proposed action plan for establishing a provincial funding and service delivery system (INAC, 1984b) were given back to the schools in written form. There were also many presentations at school staff meetings, community (reserve) meetings, and school board/local education authority meetings.

### Funding Limitations

During the early 1980s INAC had not as yet established a means to generate funds to support the establishment of special education programs and services within band-operated schools. In 1985, INAC included special education in its Directory of Services, which lists those programs for which funding will be provided. Special education is defined as follows:

> Instruction, instructional materials, student supplies, diagnostic testing and evaluation for students who have exceptional learning needs; student room and board and transportation may be provided where required. (INAC, 1985)

While this action was significant and legitimized special education as a band-operated school program, the level of funding to date has been inadequate. Schools receive special education funds based upon the following fiscal formula:

| amount per pupil ($268.24) | X | total number of enrolled students | = | total special education allocation (INAC–Manitoba, 1985) |
|---|---|---|---|---|

The amount per pupil is presently $268.24. Of this amount the schools receive 75%, that is, $200.00 per pupil (INAC, 1986a, 1986b), with the remaining 25% divided between the Tribal Councils and MIEA for program coordination, training, and technical assistance (INAC–Manitoba, 1985). In 1985, the total amount of funds allocated to all the band-operated schools

**TABLE 1**

**Students Suspected of Needing Services in Selected Band-Operated Schools of Manitoba by Grade Level and Special Needs Category**

| *Grade* | *Special Needs Category** | | | | | | | | | | | *Number of Special Needs*** | *Number of Students* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *SPH* | *SVI* | *SHI* | *SP* | *SBP* | *IIA* | *LD* | *LDP* | *AGD* | *AT* | *G* | | |
| K | 2 | 1 | | 5 | 8 | 1 | 23 | 10 | | 13 | 3 | 66 | 46 |
| 1 | 1 | | 7 | 11 | 10 | 4 | 60 | 43 | 22 | 51 | 2 | 211 | 102 |
| 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 13 | 5 | 58 | 30 | 27 | 26 | 1 | 169 | 84 |
| 3 | | 1 | 1 | 6 | 28 | 4 | 48 | 34 | 38 | 35 | 1 | 196 | 94 |
| 4 | | 4 | 1 | 6 | 16 | 8 | 60 | 41 | 35 | 33 | 3 | 207 | 91 |
| 5 | | 1 | 1 | 4 | 16 | 4 | 69 | 58 | 49 | 43 | 3 | 248 | 103 |
| 6 | | 1 | 2 | 6 | 15 | 8 | 43 | 23 | 31 | 31 | 1 | 161 | 85 |
| 7 | 1 | | 2 | 3 | 50 | 13 | 65 | 33 | 71 | 66 | 18 | 322 | 155 |
| 8 | 2 | 2 | | 2 | 14 | 2 | 41 | 32 | 23 | 36 | 2 | 156 | 71 |
| 9 | | | | | 13 | 1 | 30 | 22 | 20 | 34 | 3 | 123 | 60 |
| 10 | | | | 1 | 11 | 2 | 22 | 11 | 17 | 20 | | 84 | 33 |
| 11 | | | | 1 | 2 | | 6 | 4 | 3 | 5 | | 21 | 12 |
| 12 | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | 3 | | 5 | 4 |
| Special Class | | | 2 | | 2 | 6 | 13 | 5 | 11 | 18 | | 57 | 29 |
| Total Students | 7 | 11 | 17 | 51 | 199 | 58 | 538 | 347 | 347 | 414 | 37 | 2,026 | 969 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Number of students requiring special education assistance | 969 |
| Total number of students in surveyed schools | 3,125 |
| Percentage of students requiring services | 31% |

SPH severe physical handicap
SVI severe visual impairment
SHI severe hearing impairment
SP speech impediment
SBP severe behavior problem
IIA impairment in intellectual ability
LD learning disabilities
LDP language development problem
AGD age-grade discrepancy
AT attendance problem
G gifted

*Special needs category
**Suspected special needs students may have more than one special need.

*Note:* From *Special Needs Data Base: Summary Report* by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, INAC, 1984a, Winnipeg.

in Manitoba for special education was $1,609,392. The schools received approximately $1.2 million of this amount, while the Tribal Councils and MIEA received the remaining $409,000.

In comparison, a provincial school division similar to band-operated schools (in area, school size, and population) received $501.47 per student for special education. It should be acknowledged that the provincial schools in Manitoba have a well-defined system for receiving funds for special education students. There are both high and low incidence supports. The high incidence support is based on a formula with a grant of $23,000 for every 325 pupils. The low incidence support is designed to help those students who have severe to profound handicapping conditions. The amount of the low incidence supports ranges from Low Incidence I at $3,300 per pupil, Low Incidence II at $6,600 per pupil, to Low Incidence III at $13,200 per pupil. Additional funding is provided for clinical services and administration (Van Camp, 1986). The significantly higher level of fiscal support and the additional funding for administration and support services appears to provide adequate fiscal support for the development of comprehensive special education services that are noticeably absent in band-operated schools.

The level of special education funding provided by INAC has an especially debilitating effect in schools with small student populations. For example, during the 1985–86 school year a band-operated school with an enrollment of 116 students received $23,200 for special education. The cost of employing a qualified resource teacher and providing materials, however, was approximately $40,000.00 (Pine Creek, 1986).

### Off-Reserve Placements

The lack of special education programs at band-operated schools also encouraged the placement of Indian children with significant special needs, for example, severely physically handicapped, autistic, severely hearing and visually impaired, etc., off reserve (INAC, 1978). Under such arrangements INAC pays the total cost of such placements. In 1985, INAC–Manitoba paid $2,712,000 to provincial schools for delivering special education services to 284 Indian students (average cost $9,549.21) (INAC, 1985). It has been estimated that approximately 100–125 of these children were from band-operated schools (McLeod, 1985). If these students were to attend a band-operated school, INAC would provide the school with only $200.00 per pupil (INAC–Manitoba, 1985).

## COMMUNITY-BASED SPECIAL EDUCATION MODEL

The principles of parental responsibility and local control that guide the active participation of Indian people in the education of their children have relevance for special education as well. Community-based special education programs for Indian children with special needs ought to embody principles such as the following:

1. Equal access to school for Indian children with special needs regardless of the nature of their special learning needs.
2. Availability of appropriate, culturally sensitive special education and educational support services to all special needs Indian children.
3. Availability of early childhood special education opportunities for preschool children with special needs.
4. Opportunity for meaningful parental involvement (including informed parental consent with respect to permission to conduct an assessment, and special education placement) in all aspects of the educational decision-making process affecting their child.
5. Education of special needs Indian children with non-special needs peers within local community settings whenever appropriate.

The development and implementation of such a community-based special education program within band-operated schools will necessitate a clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities

among schools, tribal councils, INAC, and other service providers. It will also require cooperation and collaboration among the Indian community, reserve school, tribal council, and the Education Support Services Unit (see Figure 1).

The remainder of this section describes how such a model might function in relation to various governmental levels.

### Band-Operated Schools

Reserve schools would have resource room/special education teachers and early childhood special education teachers. Schools with fewer than 75 pupils would have access to a resource teacher on an itinerant basis. Teachers would receive assistance from the tribal council special education coordinator and clinicians as well as the clinicians and educational specialist from the Educational Support Services Unit. The band-operated school would also be active in home-based early intervention programs for children under 5 years of age.

### Tribal Councils

Coordination of special education programs would occur through the tribal councils. Special education coordinators would arrange for clinicans as well as serve as the link between the reserve schools and the Educational Support Services Unit clinicians and specialists.

### Educational Support Services Unit

The role of the Educational Support Services Unit would be to provide clinical and educational support to the band-operated schools, concerning identification, evaluation, and program development. Identification for special education eligibility is an important function that needs to be similar to provincial guidelines so that band-operated schools can be eligible for additional funding (Low Incidence Support) from INAC–Manitoba. This additional funding could be used to provide materials and/or aides for the special needs child.

The Educational Support Services Unit would also develop and disseminate information; provide training and information to parents and school personnel; identify service delivery gaps and needs in conjunction with schools and tribal councils; and establish demonstration projects on reserves. These functions and activities would enable Indian communities served by band-operated schools to have qualified "advice and assistance" in the area of special education.

### INAC

The federal government of Canada, through its Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada (INAC) would continue to provide necessary fiscal support. INAC would also be expected to ensure that band-operated schools, tribal councils, and the Educational Support Services Unit are accountable for delivering services. Equally important, INAC would support efforts to improve the quality of special education through the conduct of workshops, conferences, and demonstration projects.

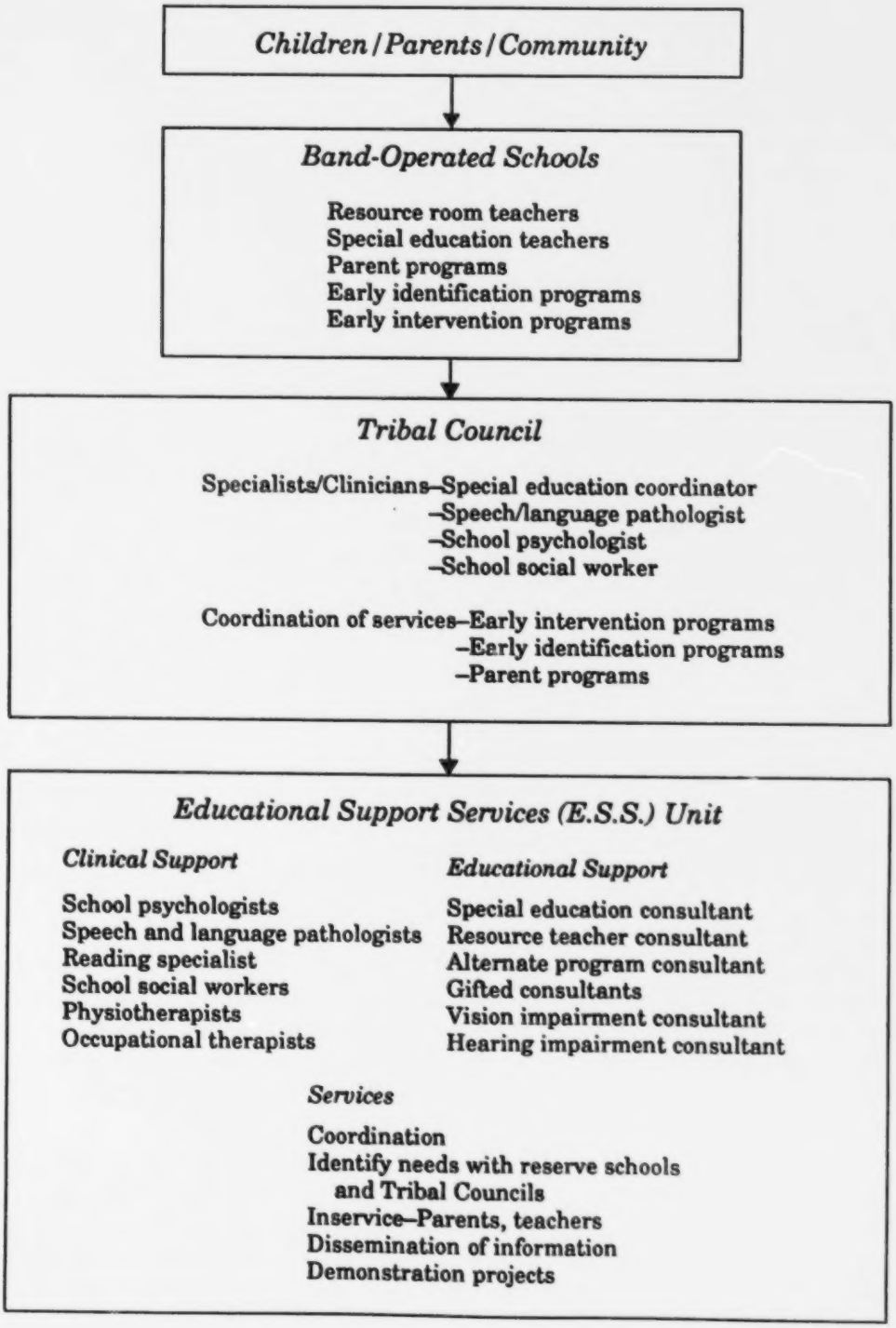
## PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVED SERVICES

### Recognition of Needed Services

The lack of services for Indian children with special needs attending band-operated schools has in part been attributed to the fact that "native people in the past were not aware of services which were, and are available to handicapped individuals in urban areas" (INAC–Manitoba, 1982, p. 152). More recently, INAC Manitoba Region officials have indicated a need for bands to provide the Department with "specific figures identifying the number of special needs children" (Necheff, 1986, p. 5).

**FIGURE 1**

**Community-Relevant Special Education Program**



The lack of awareness about special education on the part of Indian people is understandable in light of previous efforts to serve these children which did not emphasize the development of services at band-operated schools. Rather, the practice of sending Indian children with significant special needs, for example, severely physically handicapped, autistic, severely hearing and visually impaired, etc., off reserve to placements elsewhere in the province (INAC, 1978) nullified the necessity to create special education programs within local reserve communities. As a result Indian people on the reserves were deprived of the opportunity to become acquainted with special education programs or professionals.

More recently reports, surveys, and proposals submitted to INAC from band-operated schools, tribal councils, and MIEA (INAC, 1984a; INAC, 1984b; MIEA, 1983; MIEA, 1985; MIEA, 1986; Pine Creek, 1986; West Region Tribal Council, 1986) have all indicated a consistent theme: the need to establish programs for special needs Indian children. In an era of increasing Indian involvement in Indian education these desires need to be recognized, considered, and responded to in a forthright, meaningful fashion by INAC.

### Fiscal Support

While special education funding has improved over the last few years, it seems evident that the present level of fiscal support needs to be increased to be commensurate with provincial special education funding levels. Such a level of funding with annual adjustments for inflation would permit the orderly development and maintenance of services.

During the last year INAC–Manitoba, in response to the real need for additional special education funds for band-operated schools, ruled that the schools would receive 100% of the special education funds being generated, that is, $268.00 per student. The immediate effect of this action was an infusion of additional special education funds to the schools. In many instances, however, the extra funds remained insufficient to establish services or employ qualified personnel. On the other hand, the reallocation eliminated special education functions at the unit (MIEA) providing training and assistance to the schools as well as the coordination responsibilities carried out through the tribal councils. Thus, the reallocation deprives band-operated schools of qualified special education expertise and assistance in important areas such as program planning, development, and implementation.

Beyond the question of special education funding levels, consideration also needs to be given to the development of options on or near reserves for children with significant special needs. The present policy or practice of contracting with provincial schools to serve all of these students must undergo review and revision to encourage the establishment of additional options on or near reserve communities. This will entail careful planning on the part of parents, bands, INAC, and the province to ensure that these options are developed and implemented with minimal disruption to the children and youth and their families.

### Personnel

Reserves, like many rural areas, experience severe teacher shortages and high mobility. The development of programs and services on reserves will also require the following:

1. The preparation of qualified personnel to work with special needs children, who are also able to effectively serve culturally diverse children and youth.
2. The preparation of Indian special education and other related support personnel.

The building of such a cadre of Indian and non-Indian personnel will require the collaboration of bands, INAC–Manitoba, and universities.

## CONCLUSION

In recent years professionals, parents, band councils, and others associated with band-operated schools in Manitoba have increasingly voiced their concern about the need to serve

children with special needs and their families. Prohibitive funding levels, policies encouraging the placement of certain special needs Indian children off reserve, and other organizational constraints are formidible barriers to the development of culturally appropriate special education programs in these schools.

The community-based special education model proposed reflects the current trend of Indian involvement and control of Indian education whereby the reserve community has an active role in shaping programs to meet the learning needs of their children. The future development of these programs will be dependent upon sustained advocacy on the part of special education and Indian education professionals, parents, and bands as well as commitment from INAC to support and assist in the development and improvement of reserve-based special education opportunities.

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